Procopius of Gaza

(c. 465 – c. 528)

BRIEFING

Procopius of Gaza (Greek: Προκόπιος; c. 465 – 528) was a Christian sophist and rhetorician, one of the most important representatives of the famous school of his native place.

LIFE AND WORK

The little that is known of him is to be found in his letters and the *encomium* by his pupil and successor Choricius. Like many other members of the rhetorical school of Gaza, he studied in Alexandria and then became a teacher for rhetorics in his home town of Gaza though other cities like Antioch, Tyre and Caesarea Maritima vied for his service.

He was the author of numerous rhetorical and theological works. Of the former, his panegyric on the emperor Anastasius alone is extant; the description of the Hagia Sophia and the monody on its partial destruction by an earthquake are spurious.

His letters (163 in number), addressed to persons of rank, friends, and literary opponents, throw valuable light upon the condition of the sophistical rhetoric of the period and about the academic circles in Alexandria and Gaza.

Procopius' theological writings consist of commentaries on the *Octateuch*, the books of Kings and Chronicles, Isaiah, the Proverbs, the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. They are amongst the earliest examples of the "catenic" (*catena*, chain) form of commentary, consisting of a series of extracts from the fathers, arranged, with independent additions, to elucidate the portions of Scripture concerned. Photius (cod. 206), while blaming the diffuseness of these commentaries, praises the writer's learning and style, which, however, he considers too ornate for the purpose. He also wrote a monody on the earthquake of Antioch in 526 AD in and an ekphrasis of a clock in Gaza.

Complete editions of the works of Procopius in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, lxxxvii; the letters also in *Epistolographi graeci*, ed. R. Hercher (1873); see also K. Seitz, *Die Schule von Gaza* (1892); L. Eisenhofer, *Procopius von Gaza* (1897); further bibliographical notices in K Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (1897), and article by G. Kruger in *Herzog-Hauck's Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie* (1905).